



CHARACTER EDUCATION

200 W. Baltimore Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools

Revised May 2001

What is Character Education?

Parents are children's primary moral educators. Character education helps schools support the home by fostering personal and civic virtues such as respect for self and empathy for others, a sense of self-discipline and responsibility, personal integrity and trust, fairness, courage and love of learning. Character education is not a quick fix program, nor does it teach views on religion, politics, current events or other ideologically charged issues. The program helps young people be the best they can be by creating a school environment where civic virtues are taught, expected, modeled, celebrated and continually practiced by both adults and students.

What are the benefits of Character Education?

Character education has proved to be a positive force in reducing disruptive behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, and teen pregnancy. It reasserts the responsibility of schools, parents, and community members to be as concerned with the development of character as we are with the education of the intellect. Character education contributes to parental and community involvement, safe orderly teaching and learning school environments, reduced discipline problems, greater academic achievement, and high student-staff morale.

Who decides what virtues will be taught?

In collaboration with parents, teachers, and community leaders, each school will tailor character education to meet the unique needs of the school and local community. In general, character education will focus on the core ethical values which form the foundation of a democratic society: respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, justice and fairness, and citizenship.

How will children learn about character in school?

A comprehensive approach is the most effective process for implementing character education. This approach infuses character education into all aspects of the curriculum and extracurricular activities with all stakeholders involved. Some schools may develop their own character education materials, depending on the needs and goals of the community. Character education can be a natural extension of multicultural activities, school advisory councils, DARE training, and activities including students with special needs. Service learning opportunities are an important method of assisting students in developing responsibility, compassion and maturity. Conflict resolution, peer mediation, peer tutoring and mentoring activities also assist students in developing their character. Character education is not an add-on. Schools may implement activities through their school improvement plans using the components of Effective Schools research. In addition, the good character consistently modeled by teachers, principals, and other school staff members is among the most powerful means of developing good character in students.

Are all school systems participating?

Since 1983 when Maryland's Values Education Commission defined character and citizenship goals that Marylanders wanted to see fostered in schools, all 24 local school systems have been integrating character education into the curriculum. In 1996, five school systems received funds to develop character education initiatives. Maryland's grant for \$958,027 from the U.S. Department of Education was distributed over four years to: Baltimore, Calvert, Frederick, and Prince George's counties and Baltimore City. These programs included a wide range of approaches to meet children's character education needs. The pilot allowed these systems to network and share ideas to find out what worked best in different communities.

How will the program expand to other school systems?

Participation has already expanded to include all or part of the other 19 local school systems. Mini-grants have been awarded to 15 additional systems to help develop character education programs. Training and technical assistance have been provided across the state. Over 10,000 teachers have been trained impacting over 45,000 students. Lab schools have been established in the five original systems to showcase best practices in a comprehensive approach to character education. These sites represent urban, suburban and rural populations K-12. A network of LEA contacts has been established to disseminate information and further assist program development.

Lab Site Schools

Baltimore City:	Forest Park High School, 410-396-0753
Baltimore County:	Milbrook Elementary School, 410-887-1225
Calvert County:	Calvert Career Center, 410-535-7450
Frederick County:	Windsor Knolls Middle School, 240-236-5000
Prince George's County:	Fort Foote Elementary School, 301-749-4230

How will the program be evaluated?

The Character Education Office, along with MSDE, local school system coordinators, and an outside evaluator and monitor, developed an evaluation design that was multi-faceted. Data has been collected on behavior, attendance, drop-out and graduation rates, suspensions and office referrals, contributing to the information on program success. Achievement data from MSPAP and functional tests and an analysis of the School As a Caring Community Survey have been used to assess school progress in character education.

What were the results of the pilot program evaluation?

- Schools need to have a high degree of independence and authority to develop a program that meets their own unique needs.
- School climates improved dramatically after character education was introduced and the improvement was maintained over the next three years.
- Secondary school suspension rates declined from 1998-2000.
- Key factors contributing to successful programs were identified as school safety, caring relationships, teacher ownership, strong administrative leadership, supportive parents, and student recognition.
- Success depends on yearly training, constant focus, and flexibility.



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